

Reel Grrls Final Report

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

a. **Give a description of your organization and why you applied for funding.**

Since 2001, Reel Grrls has provided after-school digital media training to more than 850 diverse youth in the Puget Sound region. **We cultivate voice and leadership in girls** by empowering them to produce films about issues that are important to them. Our mentorship model distinguishes our youth program—participants don't just drop in to a computer lab after school—they develop lasting relationships with filmmakers and learn skills that propel them on to **leadership roles in their community**.

We strive to involve girls who may not otherwise have access to this type of program. 65% of participants receive financial assistance; 15% are homeless or in foster care; 62% identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority group. **We intentionally bring together girls from extremely different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds in an environment of collaboration and respect.**

At the completion of the programs, participants share the short videos they create about issues that are important to them with their community through public screenings, broadcasts and film festivals. While Reel Grrl videos cover a variety of youth topics, environmental issues are often covered.

For this project we were eager to share our curriculum and resources in a mixed-gender elementary public school setting. We also wanted to create a deeper working relationship with 2 teachers we'd had success working with in the past. The primary goal of the project was to educate young people about environmental issues and to empower them to make media messages to share with their community.

b. **Give a basic overview of your project in one paragraph (what did you do)?**

Reel Grrls worked with elementary students to create three short videos to educate other young people on environmental issues. Topics were chosen by youth participants with adult input and included:

- Reuse of everyday objects
- Container gardening
- How litter affects the watershed

In making this work, the students became more aware of important environmental issues and had a chance to share this information through innovative video techniques. These videos used 3 different animation techniques and very limited written or spoken language so as to be understood by English Language Learners and Immigrant

populations. This project takes advantage of the fact that young people will listen to their peers and culminated in 3 public and family presentations.

TRAINING

a. **How many people were trained to conduct outreach to others?**

53

b. **What were they trained to do?**

53 children were educated in environmental issues and then trained to make animated videos about environmental issues. They were trained to plan films, write scripts, create storyboards, make artwork for videos and animate their characters to illustrate collectively written stories. They were also coached in speaking in public, introducing their work and had an opportunity to answer audience questions at 3 screenings.

c. **What methods/strategies were used to train them?**

They were trained through showing strong sample work, often work made by other youth. In addition, we used hands on exercises such as:

- Surveying and photographing the school garden
- Growing kale and chard plants in milk containers
- Animating a drawing of a plant growing
- Storyboarding a finished video
- Creating new products out of common objects (water bottles, cups, paper, etc.)
- A visit to Longfellow creek where students learned about the watershed through multiple activities
- Writing down and pitching ideas
- Storyboarding
- Building props
- Animating
- Critical review
- Revision
- Opportunities to speak in public
- Experiencing how their work impacts an audience through 3 screenings.

d. **What were the successes and challenges of the training?**

The most palpable success of this training can be seen in the children's enthusiasm. They loved learning about the environment and they loved filming. Sharing what they learned through making movies was a perfect way to reinforce and celebrate their knowledge. We tried to offer all children opportunities to be involved with the actual making of the movies and any time there was a task that needed workers, practically every hand went up to help. They were eager to be involved and willing to learn and experiment.

In terms of challenges, as with most projects of this nature, we could always have used more time. The teachers we worked with changed schools this fall, causing some

difficulties in terms of getting set up and all of the demands on their schedules beyond this project. It was difficult to hit the ground running at the beginning of the semester and might have been easier as a spring project. Finally, a lot of time was necessary to educate the children on the environmental issues we covered and then to plan the videos. This left less time for the actual filmmaking and this is sometimes evident in the final products.

In addition, when working on this project we were often filming in a common space for the 4th and 5th grade. This meant other students would wander out and watch what we were doing and ask questions. One of the most frequent questions was, “when are you doing this with our class?” Unfortunately, we could only work with the 2 classes.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

a. **Provide the following information regarding each product that was developed and or distributed for this project:**

Building Community Video

- What did you create/modify for this project?

We created an animated video about how container gardening can build community. The video tells a story of a boy who finds trash on the street and brings it into his house and transforms it into a planter, which he puts on his balcony. Then a friend starts pitching in, the plants start growing and he ends up with vegetables. When he sees a neighbor come out to start her own garden he shares some of his produce with her.

- Why did you choose this product?

We wanted to celebrate a small positive thing that someone could do for themselves and suggest that others can be influenced by such small changes.

- What was the process for developing this product?

We started by educating the children about gardening. Then we educated them about film making. We had to develop a short visual story, which the youth storyboarded and then we worked with the youth to build props and characters. Finally the film was shot by the young people in both classes (in shifts of 3-4) and then the lead artist edited the film.

b. **What were the successes and challenges of the development of the outreach tool?**

The story gets the idea of gardening from reused materials across pretty well. It seems to get the idea of the gardening catching on to neighbors a little less well. Also, because of where this project fell in the school year we had to work on the gardening project first. This was a more challenging animation technically because we were working with 3 dimensional characters and props. There were some funny mistakes in making this project but overall it seemed to work out.

Reuse Video

- What did you create/modify for this project?

We created an animated film using pixilation (a process where people are animated) about how everyday objects can be reused and made into fun and usable things.

- Why did you choose this product?

We wanted to encourage students ways to waste less without wagging our fingers at them. We wanted to celebrate what they CAN do, rather than tell them what NOT to do.

- What was the process for developing this product?

We taught the 4th grade students about reuse and had them bring in an object that they wanted to make into something else. We helped them to find things that they could make with each of their objects and then students worked in small groups to make their reuse objects. We then had students work in small groups to storyboard an idea for their section of the video. We chose the best ideas and then created a master storyboard with a small group of students. We then videotaped the scenes on a few separate occasions. The lead artist edited the footage to make the final video, with the students helping on revisions.

What were the successes and challenges of the development of the outreach tool?

Because of the age of the children, it was difficult to find reuse activities that they could safely do on their own. However, the children were very enthusiastic about the project and got very into the acting opportunity that it offered. In the end the video is very sweet and shows a variety of ideas presented by a diversity of children. This was a very good project for involving the whole class.

Watershed Video

- What did you create/modify for this project?

We made an animated video, using cut paper, that explores the path of litter and its impact on water and wildlife.

- Why did you choose this product?

Wildlife are very important to children of this age and litter is a real problem in their neighborhood and schools. By looking at the correlation, we hope the children will think about their actions and those of others.

- What was the process for developing this product?

Fifth grade students learned about the watershed, including a fieldtrip to Longfellow creek. We then had the students come up with ideas about how they would share what they learned through video. The students each came up with proposals for a video and pitched them. We took the best ideas from the group and had a small group storyboard the video. The students then built characters, props and backgrounds. We then animated the video in small sections. The lead artist edited the video, had it critiqued by the

children, then re-edited and had the youth shoot more video and then re-edited the video with sound and music.

What were the successes and challenges of the development of the outreach tool?

This was an interesting project in terms of narrative structure. The children came up with a pretty complicated video that lacked connection between the problem and a solution. They had their characters suddenly become good after being bad for the first part of the movie. We had to work to find a rationale for the change. It seems to work in the end but planning took a long time and there was not as much time as we'd have liked for the shooting.

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

a. **How many total people did your project educate about your chosen topics?**

This project directly educated 53 youth who took part in the school program. Additionally, there were approximately 265 people at the "Premiere" event at South Shore School, followed by a library event of 26 and an assembly of approximately 669 children, 72 school staff and 30 parents. This totals 1115 people educated about the chosen topics.

In addition, the video has been posted on the Reel Grrl's Vimeo page as well as Puget Sound Off and Facebook. The video is also being sent to staff at the Aquarium, Islandwood and the Burke Museum who all have expressed interest in including the DVD in teaching kits they loan out to King County Educators. We have also been discussing the possibility of showing the video in an Islandwood summit of youth this spring. Finally, the Seattle Public Schools Science Department is posting the video on their website for access by teachers in the district. While it is hard to predict in-direct audience numbers from the above venues, we estimate an additional 1,500+ audience views will be reached, bringing our total outreach number to 2615.

b. **Who were the primary audiences for your education and outreach activities (i.e. youth, elderly, low-income, Hispanic, Somali, Chinese, etc.)?**

Low income and immigrant youth and their families.

c. **Provide the following information for each outreach activity you conducted to educate people about your chosen topics.**

- Type of activity (e. g. festival, film screening, school assembly, etc.)

Screening for children and parents from 4th and 5th grade at South Shore School

- Topics included in activity

The importance of "everyday actions" as in composting, reducing litter, gardening and reuse of everyday objects.

- Number of people educated

- Location of the activity

South Shore School

- Method of recruiting audience

Students were sent home with invitations for up to 3 people to attend from each household.

- Description of the staff activities/duties at the event

The event was a dinner hosted by the principal. Duties included:

- Selling reuse items for fundraising
- Hanging informational comics to share the process of the program
- Setting up venue, including tables, signage, and a “museum” to educate people about the process of making the work.
- Overseeing youth introductions of the films
- Creating programs
- Contacting photographers to take pictures
- Presenting videos
- Collecting data from adult visitors
- Setting up and running audio visual equipment
- Raffle
- Type of activity (e. g. festival, film screening, school assembly, etc.)

Library presentation and video presentation

- Topics included in activity

Kelly Rula from Resource Venture presented on where things go: garbage, recycling, compost and litter. Following this the youth presented their videos and answered questions.

- Number of people educated

- Location of the activity

Rainier Beach Library meeting room

- Method of recruiting audience

Flyers were put out at the library and at the school. The flyers were also given to all the youth in the production program and it was announced at the first event. In addition the

flyer was sent by email and posted on the Reel Grrls Facebook page. Finally, we did a little direct inviting of people at the library that rainy afternoon.

- Description of the staff activities/duties at the event

This event required minimal labor on the day of the event.

- Presenting videos
 - Collecting data from adult visitors
 - Setting up and running audio visual equipment
 - Overseeing youth introductions of the films
 - Hanging informational comics to share the process of the program
- Type of activity (e. g. festival, film screening, school assembly, etc.)

School assembly

- Topics included in activity

The assembly itself was a celebration before the holidays for the entire student body. Our part of the assembly was a screening of the three videos with youth introductions.

- Number of people educated

Approximately 771

- Location of the activity

South Shore School

- Method of recruiting audience

Not applicable, school event that all attend.

- Description of the staff activities/duties at the event
- Presenting videos
- setting up and running audio visual equipment
- Overseeing youth introductions of the films

d. **What was your outreach method?**

Most of the activities were school related so outreach was done primarily to students and their families.

e. **What were the successes and challenges of the methods?**

We had a very large audience of enthusiastic viewers. The only challenge is perhaps that this is a very busy time of year for everyone and I think that it was hard to get RSVPs for the dinner event--we had many more attendees than expected.

f. **What would you change or do differently (if anything) regarding outreach?**

For events like this, the method seemed to work fine.

BUDGET

a. **Provide an estimate of the total time and money you spent on your project. Include all expenses reported for the project. Provide any insight you have regarding how you achieved project success and what additional funding would be needed for potential expansion of the project in the future.**

This information will be used to help others who want to implement similar projects better understand the true costs and time commitment.

Type of Expense	Description of Expenses	Total Number of Hours	Total Dollar Value
Paid Labor:	Staff & Contractors	590 Hrs	\$21,300
Volunteer Time (valued at \$20/hr):	Parents & friends	35 Hrs	\$ 700
Non-Labor Expenses:	Equipment, travel, etc	N/A	\$ 6,284
TOTAL		625 Hrs	\$28,284

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION & BENEFIT

a. **If you had PARTNERS helping you with the project, provide the following information.**

- Partner name

South Shore School

- Partner roles and responsibilities

Teachers helped to create the framework for the media activities. The lead artist did some teaching of the environmental issues but relied heavily of the integration of the materials into the classroom on a larger level. The teachers met with lead artist multiple times and helped guide especially the planning process. Also, since the video could not involve all children at all times, the teachers helped to distribute the work and manipulated their teaching schedules to accommodate the filming.

- Total number of hours contributed

Approximately 100 from each teacher (200 hours)

b. If you had VOLUNTEERS helping you with the project, provide the following information.

- Total number of volunteers

4

- Total number of hours contributed

35

- Volunteer roles and responsibilities
 - Help setting up Audio/Visual Equipment
 - Help with filming on shoot days at the end of the project
 - Help at the final event photographing students.

c. Describe how the community benefited from your project (i.e. access to resources, youth leadership development, job skills, community building, public health, etc.)

The primary way that the community has benefited from our project is through the screenings. Many parents, teachers and staff attended screenings and were extremely enthusiastic. Some have asked about the process of making the work and have expressed an interest in doing similar projects. The intention of this project is that the children will have an ability to influence their families through what they have learned. The children have become more effective speakers on environmental issues and this means they are able to take their learning beyond the classroom, to their families, friends and peers.

LESSONS LEARNED

a. Do you consider the results of your project successful? Why or why not? Describe the impact on the community and any outgrowth of activities or inspiration, if any, as a result of it.

The biggest indicator of how successful this project is is the children's ability to speak with passion about the topic, share their work with pride and articulate their enthusiasm for the process. This planted some important seeds for the young people. In addition, the videos turned out really well and people are able to enjoy them at the same time as they learn from them.

b. What strategies were essential to the success of your project and why were they effective?

Teaching through doing was very important to the success of this project because children were able to learn actively and integrate that learning into what they are teaching others through the video. In addition, using animation as a tool really allows us to reach people at the same time as teaching innovation and creativity. Finally, by not chastising our audience and staying relatively positive in how we presented environmental topics,

we were able to reach audiences who otherwise may not have been receptive to our messaging.

- c. **Describe any barriers or challenges you encountered during the project. Explain how you addressed them and how these might be avoided in the future.**

The most difficult challenge in this project was including every child in the process of making these videos. We had a large group of 53 young enthusiastic people. We worked to make the videos have lots of different scenes so that we could shoot them concurrently in small groups. This was most successful with the watershed video. In the future, we would probably stress this even more in the stories themselves so we could include the maximum number of students in the production process.

- d. **Describe any project success stories or anecdotes you would like to share.**

This was a really great project due to the enthusiasm of the youth themselves. On the first day that I came in to do a very simple photo project I had a student come up to me to tell me that he now had an interest in photography that he didn't have before. It only got better from there. Youth this age are eager to learn, eager to participate and eager to share what they know. They are not as afraid as some of their elder classmates to express their interest in the world and they are at an age where if we can teach them how to take better care of the world it will continue to resonate later in their lives in the way they think and behave.

I remember one really difficult day where we were looking at videos about garbage in the watershed. Children were very distracted and it was easy to get impatient with them. In thinking about how distracted they were, I asked "does this bore you?" and they unanimously said "no." I then asked, "does this scare you?" and they said "yes." Our world is so full of things to be scared of but I think it really made a difference to the children that they were able to make work that will make a difference in the world and the work does not just stay in the classroom but will be seen by many people they don't even know.

- e. **What advice would you give for groups who would like to implement similar projects?**

- Expect the planning time to take 3 times the amount of time as making the videos.
- Start with one video and consider making others after you have completed the first.
- Watch lots of good sample video work before starting your own project.
- Work with a small group of youth—ideally 20 as opposed to 50 at a time.